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Support for volunteering**

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Context

> Volunteerism is an important component of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction, sustainable development and social integration, in particular overcoming social exclusion and discrimination (Report of the Commission for Social Development (E/2001/26), resolution 39/2)

1. The decision taken by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/17 to proclaim 2001 the International Year of Volunteers has done much to focus the attention of the international community on volunteering. The responsibility of Governments to develop comprehensive strategies and programmes to support volunteering is explicitly recognized for the first time in the outcome document of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly, entitled "World Summit for Social Development and beyond: achieving social development for all in a globalizing world" (General Assembly resolution S-24/2, annex). In its resolution 55/57, the Assembly encouraged Governments, organizations of the United Nations system and other actors to take all possible actions to promote volunteering. It also decided that two plenary meetings of the fifty-sixth session of the Assembly should be devoted to volunteering. The full list of resolutions and documents dealing with volunteering since the designation of the International Year of Volunteers by the Assembly in 1997 is provided in the annex to the present report.

2. The resolutions build on work coordinated by the United Nations Volunteers in its capacity as focal point for the Year. Expert meetings, held in November 1999 and May 2000, developed general parameters for volunteering and highlighted its contributions and the areas for promotion. An expert meeting, held in November 2000, reviewed volunteering largely from the perspective of developing countries and emphasized that partnerships between Government and civil society are essential if the potential of voluntary action is to be fully realized. Another expert meeting, held in July 2001, focused on the role of volunteering in the fight against poverty.

3. The present report draws on these and other meetings on volunteering that have taken place in the context of the International Year of Volunteers. It recognizes the many-faceted dimensions of volunteerism with a bearing on economic and social policy in both developed and developing countries as well as on development and humanitarian assistance

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extended through the United Nations system. In the case of the latter, it is important to acknowledge the significant contribution of donor Governments through bilateral programmes as well as, of course, through support for programmes of the United Nations system itself. It also needs to be said that civil society, including non-governmental organizations, is greatly energized by volunteerism and draws on voluntary action to carry out its work. Increasingly, the private sector is seen as having a stake in volunteerism as one manifestation of corporate social responsibility. Creating an enabling environment for volunteerism to flourish calls for collaborative efforts on the part of all sectors of society. The information contained in the present report, in accordance with resolution 55/57, is concerned with ways Governments and the United Nations system can support volunteering.

II. Volunteering: an evolving paradigm

> Whenever there is a funeral, we work together ... women draw water, collect firewood and collect maize flour from well-wishers ... while the men dig the grave and bury the dead ... We work together on community projects like moulding bricks for a school ...Women also work together when cleaning around boreholes. (Quoted in *World Development Report 2000/2001*, p. 128)

4. To volunteer one's time and effort to help others is a basic human impulse. Volunteering plays a vital role in preserving the stability and cohesion of societies and makes a significant, but largely overlooked, economic contribution. It also brings considerable benefits to people who have the opportunity to volunteer. Moreover, volunteering helps to widen social, economic and cultural networks, enhances self-esteem, meets the need of people to learn from each other, facilitates acquisition of skills and experience thus widening employment options and builds up reserves of goodwill that can be drawn upon when needed. Young people who volunteer are better able to develop their potentialities, share knowledge and skills and secure employment; working adults, through social contacts, obtain opportunities for career advancement; and older people who volunteer can expect to live longer, healthier lives. The traditional view of volunteering as purely altruistic service is evolving into one characterized by benefits to everyone involved, in other words, reciprocity.

5. Equally important is the shift away from the perception of poor people as sole beneficiaries of volunteering to one in which collective forms of voluntary action are a fundamental way they participate in society. Voluntary action, when undertaken together by those living in poverty and those who do not, leads to innovative partnerships and creates bridges between sectors of society. Voluntary action therefore is a major component in the fight against poverty and destitution. Indeed, the inability of an individual or family to access reciprocal ties of voluntary behaviour within the neighbourhood or community, as well as within their society and the world at large, is one extreme form of exclusion. Terms such as "neighbouring" and "active community", which are beginning to find currency in the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively, are helping to redress the image of the passivity of poor people in poor countries. Some form of volunteering can be identified in almost every society, but it has been largely overlooked as a vital resource in addressing issues of human development and human security. The present report highlights the role and contribution of volunteerism and identifies ways in which Governments and the United Nations system can support an environment within which volunteering can flourish.

III. Volunteering: the question of parameters

6. In most societies, volunteering is a fundamental part of peoples' lives and most languages have terms to describe it. From *shramadana* in South Asia, *harambee* in East Africa, *mingu* in Latin America and *al taawun wal tawasul* in many Arab States, the act is very familiar, even if the word "volunteer" is not. Three basic criteria can be identified to distinguish volunteering from other types of human activity:

- It is not undertaken primarily for financial gain. Because voluntary action is not rewarded with a wage or salary, it is generally cost-effective, although not cost-free, as discussed later in the report;
- It is undertaken of one's own free will. The decision to volunteer may be influenced by peer pressure or personal feelings of obligation to

society but, in essence, the individual must be in a position to choose whether or not to volunteer;

- It benefits a third party or society at large. Actions that benefit only the person who volunteers or that cause harm to society do not meet this criterion.

7. Action falling within these parameters may be categorized as: mutual aid and self-help; formal service delivery; civic engagement; and campaigning with overlap among the various volunteer types. A group may form for income-generating purposes, establish a mutual health fund, campaign for access to an infrastructure facility and extend services to less well-off members of the community. Volunteering is not a time-bound occupational category, but a widespread form of social behaviour.

8. **Mutual aid or self-help**. In many parts of the developing world, this form of voluntary action constitutes a mainstay of social and economic support systems. From small, informal kinship and clan groupings to more formal, rotating credit associations and welfare groups, voluntary collective activity is central to the welfare of communities. Volunteering along these lines is also important in industrialized countries, particularly in the health field.

9. **Formal service delivery**. Citizens also volunteer time through formal organizations in fields such as health, literacy, sports and social welfare. The service may be local, national or international in scope and be part of the governmental, non-governmental or private sector. The focus is on support to others, but individuals who volunteer also derive benefits themselves.

10. **Civic engagement**. Whether it concerns representation on government consultative bodies or user involvement in local development projects, the full engagement of all citizens in the life of a society is an essential component of good governance, as recognized at the World Summit for Social Development. This is becoming accepted as a key factor in effective strategies for human development.

11. **Campaigning**. Achieving a worldwide ban on landmines, passing measures to combat racism, raising public awareness of human rights abuses and environmental destruction and publicizing the concerns of the women's movement have all resulted from massive voluntary action. Some campaigns are localized; others are global in their reach, aided by the Internet. The anti-landmine campaign, for example, involved more than 300 million volunteers from over 100 countries.

IV. Contributions of volunteering

> In India voluntarism is an ancient social behaviour and therefore needs no articulation of its importance. The Ghandian movement was quintessentially based on the spirit of voluntary work. In our development process too this spirit has been demonstrated on numerous occasions. (Statement of the representative of India on the role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development, to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-ninth session)

A. Economic

12. Available empirical data points to the sizeable economic contribution of volunteering. Surveys in the United States of America suggest that volunteering equals 9 million full-time jobs with a value of US$ 225 billion a year; in Canada, the figures are 1.11 billion hours a year or 578,000 full-time jobs with an estimated value of US$ 11 billion; and in the Netherlands, 802 million hours a year are spent in volunteering, or 455,000 full-time jobs equivalent to $13.65 billion. In the United Kingdom, volunteering is valued at the equivalent of $57 billion a year and in South Korea 3,898,564 people volunteered over 451 million hours in 1999 with a value exceeding $2 billion. While methodologies for calculation vary from country to country, making comparisons unreliable, where data does exist, volunteering is believed to account for between 8 per cent and 14 per cent of gross domestic product.

13. Little attention has been paid to the monetary value of voluntary action in developing countries. However, any notion of halving extreme poverty by 2015 or making serious inroads so as to assist the 700 million people without access to primary health care, clearly calls for massive self-help, voluntary effort on the part of concerned people themselves with appropriate support from Governments. The United Nations system and other external agents can

supplement internal efforts but cannot substitute for them.

B. Social

14. As important as the economic impact of volunteering is the channel that voluntary action offers for people from all social groups to participate in society. Young people can acquire skills and a valuable grounding in citizenship through volunteering; older people who volunteer can expect to lead more fulfilling and even longer lives; people with disabilities can demonstrate that far from being at the receiving end of assistance, they have a valuable contribution to make themselves.

15. Volunteering also builds up reserves of trust and cohesion and can contribute in a significant way to peaceful coexistence in potential conflict and post-conflict situations, whether at the local or national level. Vibrant volunteering is a constituent part of the glue that holds together the social fabric of democratic societies, without which it is difficult to envisage a responsive and responsible civil society. The social contract that sustains volunteering is not legal but moral, is not forced but chosen. The conception of one's obligations as a citizen to help others is matched by what one expects in return. The notion of "enlightened self-interest" captures well the reciprocity that is at the root of volunteering.

V. Volunteering and global concerns

16. As emphasized in the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000), the central challenge faced today is to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for the world's people. The report calls for the formation of coalitions for change, often with partners from outside the usual circles. No shift, it is stated, is more critical than putting people at the centre of everything. People are, through voluntary action, actively engaged at the front lines of many areas of major global concern. This section illustrates the contribution of volunteerism in the fields of poverty reduction, environmental protection and regeneration, health, and disaster management and mitigation.

A. Poverty reduction

> I have heard [our] community referred to as low-income and at-risk and it denotes helplessness. We do not lay claim to this. We refer to ourselves as a community of opportunity, a community of strong assets and capable leadership. (Resident, Greensboro, North Carolina, quoted in *A Matter of Survival: Volunteering* (Washington, D.C., Points of Light Foundation, 2001))

17. All Governments and the international community can play a role in dispelling the image of passivity and helplessness often ascribed to the poor. Self-help and mutual aid have always been central features of survival strategies of poor people to withstand man-made and natural shocks to which they are exposed. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Poverty Report 2000, "the foundation of poverty reduction is self-organization of the poor at the community level — the best antidote to powerlessness, a central source of poverty". Nevertheless, such efforts are often too small-scale, uncoordinated and under-resourced to make significant inroads in helping poor people overcome poverty in a sustainable way. In recent times such traditional forms of volunteerism have been under considerable strain as a result of such factors as the displacement of populations whether due to civil strife or to out-migration from rural to urban areas, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the breaking down of local cultural identities and the generalized increasing economic uncertainty and vulnerability.

18. There is great scope for Governments and the United Nations system to help to address some of the challenges for volunteerism at the local, national and international level, although this has to be handled sensitively so the creativity and knowledge of poor people are built upon and not replaced. A starting point is the recognition that poverty reduction strategies and programmes of Governments and the United Nations system, although not specifically targeted at local-level volunteerism, do impinge in some way on the ability and willingness of people to undertake voluntary action. The next step is to ensure that the nature of the interaction between external initiatives and volunteering by poor people is understood and strategically incorporated into poverty reduction programmes. These may be concerned with access to basic social services, achievement of sustainable

livelihoods, promotion of systems of social protection against adverse shocks and fostering social integration, and building partnerships between different segments of the population. Since 1989, the UNDP Africa 2000 Network has supported local sustainable development initiatives with human and material resources, building on existing webs of reciprocity and trust and the voluntary interest of the stakeholders through participation on national steering committees. This initiative has led to improvements in the lives of large numbers of people.

19. Building on local or larger volunteer systems already in place will not alone eliminate poverty, but it will produce results that are more likely to be sustainable in the longer term. This approach also represents a more cost-effective way of proceeding. Costs are involved, however, in providing needed material and human resources, including national and international volunteers, as well as ensuring a favourable legal and fiscal environment for local groups and associations to flourish. A "people-centred" agenda has been developing in recent years within poverty-related programmes of the United Nations system. There are indications that more explicit recognition is beginning to emerge on the contribution of volunteering to the success of many of these initiatives.

20. The extent to which peoples' needs are met in more formal work situations depends on organizational strength. Workers have often turned to mutual aid organizations to press their claims and, in their early stages of life, unions often rely on volunteerism in their search for collective bargaining power. Most Union activists all over the world who are seeking to ensure secure and non-discriminatory workplace practices for workers do so on a voluntary basis.

B. Environmental protection and regeneration

> Communities residing in different neighbourhoods and villages may have structures and occasions in which they tackle common issues and problems. These structures offer ideal platforms from which great contributions can be made to the environment. (United Nations Environment Programme, *Taking Action: An Environmental Guide for You and Your Community*, Nairobi, 1995)

21. Providing ready access to natural resources is one key component of poverty reduction strategies. Fish from rivers and the sea, fuelwood from forests and non-timber products from land all serve to complement the products the poor can obtain with their income. When degradation occurs, the poor are the first to suffer. Much environmental preservation and regeneration depends on voluntary action by the poor in defence of common property resources such as village wood lots and free access water bodies. Population pressure and rising demand from urban areas can put enormous pressure on the ability of poor people to respect the finite nature of natural resources, although this can be tempered by ensuring appropriate institutions, clear property rights and technological availability. The impact of voluntary action by poor people in the environmental field, as elsewhere, is greatly enhanced where there is capacity to work with other segments of the society to form local organizations and manage them successfully. Such organizations provide an interface with local government, non-governmental organizations and other external actors, helping to ensure "bottom-up" approaches and the effective participation of poor people. Environmental degradation applies equally to rapidly expanding towns and cities where the problems of poor people include inadequate water supplies, sanitation and waste disposal. Successful interventions with high levels of household participation and functioning local management systems tend to be those which identify and build on existing local voluntary structures and initiatives.

22. The intensity of collective voluntary action in the management of common property resources depends on the level of trust in a community. Trust can be engendered through the granting of secure long-term user rights to land or water or, in the case of city dwellers, of secure housing tenure. People often choose to volunteer time to natural resource management with a view to forming stronger reciprocal relationships that can contribute to greater livelihood security. This is especially the case of poor people. In Haiti, even landless households volunteer labour to watershed management activities, in part to strengthen networks with landlords who might later offer other opportunities including employment.

C. Health

23. Recent decades have seen enormous progress in basic health care, which has brought about dramatic increases in life expectancy and sharp declines in infant mortality. The spread of HIV/AIDS now threatens these achievements and has become a social crisis on a global scale. Volunteers are on the frontline of the battle to contain HIV/AIDS. In the Insiza district of Zimbabwe, the Insiza Godlwayo AIDS Council works with 500 organized volunteers and another 500 local people who provide voluntary support of a more informal and spontaneous nature. Care is provided for the sick and the orphaned, helping to keep communities together. Funds are raised to pay for rudimentary health care services. The tomatoes, soap, candles and ground maize that the volunteers provide themselves, augment the Council's small budget of $17,000. Some communities have planted special gardens from which only volunteers can harvest and have created funds to help pay the school fees of the volunteers' children. Where the work of volunteer-based groups like the Council is recognized, support from the public and private sectors is often forthcoming and partnerships are struck, producing promising results. One such initiative, entitled "Living with AIDS", a collaborative effort between UNAIDS and the United Nations Volunteers, is helping to integrate people living with HIV/AIDS into mainstream HIV/AIDS campaigns and strengthening the ability of communities to understand and cope with the epidemic by bringing the knowledge of those living with the disease into the public arena.

24. A success story of the United Nations in the health field is the Polio Eradication Initiative, spearheaded by the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization. Over 10 million volunteers, mostly from local communities, working with government programmes made possible the immunization of 550 million children in 2000, bringing infection rates down by 99 per cent since the beginning of the campaign, from 350,000 to just 3,500 cases. The prospect of eradicating the second of the world's major diseases is now firmly in sight. The value of the volunteer contribution is estimated to have exceeded $10 billion, far beyond the resources available to Governments and the international community. Beyond the economics of this example, the millions of volunteers who participated in the initiative received invaluable exposure to basic health care and hygiene and this reservoir of experience can be applied to a wide range of national and international health initiatives. Other positive spin-offs include the forging of relationships between local volunteers and the public sector as well as the development of organizational capacity at the local level.

25. Growing evidence of connections between HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, including the transmission of various sexually transmitted diseases, has helped keep reproductive issues on the global agenda. The United Nations Population Fund supports community-based projects that stress local empowerment through community participation. By linking opportunities to volunteer as reproductive health educators to women's empowerment and income-generation, broader development issues are opening up to previously isolated communities.

26. The reliability of basic health services, whether in the domain of HIV/AIDS, polio or reproductive health, depends to a considerable degree on the availability of safe blood supplies. Volunteer non-remunerated donors are less likely than paid donors to conceal personal information that could endanger the integrity of the system. Giving blood is a feature of every society, North and South alike. Indeed, in some developing countries, giving blood is considered the foremost expression of volunteerism. Volunteer donors or "co-health workers" receive free basic medical check-ups, but this does not diminish the generosity of the original donation. Successful national and international campaigns to mobilize volunteer contributions in the health field, as elsewhere, are those which build on the mixed motivations of solidarity and improved well-being of the volunteer.

D. Disaster management and mitigation

> In many African countries, volunteers are instrumental in enabling national hydrological services to play a more effective role in the socio-economic development of their countries. One important criterion for selecting hydrological stations includes the presence of people who can volunteer to read the rain gauges. (Statement made by the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, 2001)

27. Poor people are especially vulnerable to the impact of disasters, whether natural or man-made, and have devised their own strategies for coping, which

include the vital role played by volunteerism. Volunteers from inside and outside affected communities play an essential part in post-natural disaster reconstruction efforts. The fallout from the earthquake in Kobe, Japan, in 1995 was the incident which triggered Japan's decision to call for an International Year of Volunteers and led the Japanese media to coin the term "Year One of Volunteerism", describing the seemingly sudden emergence of a volunteer movement in that country. Over a million citizens stepped forward to volunteer to help, first providing vitally needed material relief assistance and then, in the aftermath of the tragedy, interpersonal care and informational support. In the case of Hurricane Mitch, which devastated large parts of central America in 1999, foreign volunteers including United Nations Volunteers serving in the affected countries were released from their tasks to work alongside national volunteers to assist the affected populations. The following year, during the cyclone in the Indian state of Orissa, which touched 15 million people, the many thousands of national volunteers who were mobilized, together with foreign volunteers, formed the backbone of the massive relief efforts coordinated by the state government.

28. Forecasting the weather and related climatic phenomena plays a vital role in disaster prevention and mitigation. Millions of volunteer farmers, fishermen, pilots and sea captains read and give feedback on hydrological and meteorological gauges on a regular basis. Their reports on climatic conditions form the core of modern weather reporting, providing early warning of severe weather patterns coordinated on a global level by the World Meteorological Organization, which chose to dedicate World Weather Day 2001 to volunteerism. Volunteer amateur radio operators played a highly appreciated role in recent forest fires in South-East Asia. By complementing Government efforts through the provision of rapid information about the situation on the ground, appropriate measures could be taken.

29. There is growing evidence that peaceful coexistence benefits from vibrant voluntary action, especially where such action cuts across ethnic, religious, age, income and gender lines. The World Bank highlights how social capital, of which volunteering is one important component, can help build cohesive societies with mechanisms necessary for mediating or managing conflict before it turns violent. Avoiding violent conflict calls for state policies that are inclusive, equitable and empowering. However, to get the policies right may still be valid, but it is not sufficient. Getting the social relations right is necessary. Part of the equity consideration relates to gender. The creation of political space for women's participation in peace-building is assisted by strategies aimed at enhancing women's political skills and strengthening relations between Governments and volunteer-based women's organizations. One such initiative is the Federation of African Women's Peace Networks, supported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, which facilitates women's participation in policy dialogue at national and international levels in conflict and post-conflict situations.

30. Internal conflict has been a hallmark of the post-cold war years. Once hostilities have died out there is a vital role for volunteerism, especially individuals from outside the conflict area. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the United Nations Volunteers have formed a close partnership, which has facilitated the channelling of volunteer specialists to work in post-conflict peace-building. Since 1991, when a contingent of United Nations Volunteers was assigned to serve with the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia, some 4,000 United Nations Volunteers, representing 135 nationalities, have served in 19 separate peace operations, including in East Timor, Guatemala, Haiti, Kosovo, Mozambique, Rwanda and Sierra Leone. This partnership has been a major factor in helping the United Nations to meet the increasing demand for cost-effective qualified personnel. A key factor in the success of volunteer input is not cost but, as pointed out in the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (see A/55/305), commitment to service and empathy with local people, which are the hallmarks of volunteers.

31. Other examples of volunteering within the ambit of the United Nations abound, often in unexpected places. For instance, effective postal systems link distant populations. In conflict and post-conflict situations the disruption of this vital public service separates citizens from their support networks, thus limiting reserves of social capital, which in turn reduces the willingness of individuals to volunteer time. To break this cycle, an initiative of the Universal Postal Union provides opportunities for experts from

functioning postal services to volunteer to rebuild services affected by conflict. The impact of this programme extends beyond administrative reconstruction, as it helps to enhance the organizational capacity of local groups.

VI. Government and United Nations-system support for volunteering

32. The link between volunteering and economic and social development is increasingly recognized in developed countries, as evidenced by expanding research on the subject, parliamentary hearings, legislation, media coverage and other signs of interest. By contrast, in developing countries, voluntary action is rarely singled out as a subject for special analytical study and measurement and is even less considered as a matter for public policy and action. In many instances, volunteering is so deeply embedded in long-standing traditions that it is not always seen as a variable that can be pro-actively influenced by external actors. There is also some reticence on the part of some Governments to consider volunteering as a domain for public intervention. However, there are many determinants of the well-being of volunteerism in any society, which depend directly and indirectly on action taken by Governments.

33. In some instances there is a temptation to regard volunteering as one means to compensate for the reduction in the size and outreach of the public sector brought about by economic crisis or by ideological precepts on the extent to which the State should intervene in the lives of citizens. However, a vibrant level of volunteering depends on a strong and effective Government, one that recognizes the contribution that volunteering makes in extending the reach and enhancing the sustainability of programmes in the public domain, not replacing them. The challenge is to seek ways whereby actions by Governments and activities of individuals and groups with similar commitments who volunteer time can be mutually reinforcing through common actions rather than striving to create autonomous communities. Far from being a second best option, volunteering offers an enormous pool of skills and resources that can complement Government initiatives. Partnerships are built on trust. The curtailment of the legitimate role and responsibility of the State to provide appropriate support for volunteering to flourish may diminish the confidence of citizens in Government and lead to a decline in overall volunteer effort.

34. Another temptation to be avoided is to attempt to co-opt voluntary action for its own ends. Volunteerism flourishes where individuals and groups have the freedom to choose the nature of their volunteer activities in an environment conducive to active citizen involvement. The challenge for Governments is to determine the ideal balance between articulating the rights and responsibilities of citizens to volunteer and defending the citizen's freedom of choice as to how and where to volunteer.

35. This section focuses on ways that Governments, together with the United Nations system, can promote volunteerism at all levels. Its point of departure is that it is not possible to accept one universal model of best practice since what works well in one country may not work in another with very different cultures and traditions. There is no common recipe for success. Actions by Governments and the United Nations system are treated separately for the sake of clarity but, in reality, they are mutually reinforcing, as shown by the examples provided in section V. Immunizing 550 million children against polio in 1999 required coordinated efforts on the part of many thousands of government health officials and hundreds of staff from the United Nations system in addition to the millions of volunteers referred to previously.

A. Government support

36. **Enhancing the knowledge base**. The International Year of Volunteers has generated extensive discussion regarding measures different actors can take to promote volunteering in a variety of social and cultural settings. Governments can provide for such discussion, ensuring it is based on a sound appreciation of the parameters, profile and trends of volunteering in the particular country context. Studies on volunteering are ideally undertaken by independent public policy research or academic institutions, but where these are absent, as is the case in many developing countries, Governments can initiate the research themselves, in partnership with other stakeholders. Where support is sought from external sources, care needs to be taken not to distort the country's own perspectives on volunteerism.

37. **Measuring contributions**. Putting an economic value on volunteering may help to highlight one

important aspect of its overall contribution to society and assist in the development of informed policies which take into account the different levels of participation of women and men in different fields of volunteering. "Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit", issued by the United Nations Volunteers in 2001 on the basis of information provided by countries with experience in this matter, may be helpful in this respect.

38. **Disseminating information**. The results of studies and surveys can be disseminated through the media, schools and other channels with attention given to ensuring that information is accessible to disadvantaged segments of the population. One means of ensuring debate on the subject of volunteering are public hearings. In some countries, such hearings are organized in Parliaments across party lines with people providing testimony from all parts of the country and from different sectors of society. Governments can promote such dialogue.

39. **Legislation**. Governments can introduce enabling or enforcing legislation. The former encourages or inspires citizens to volunteer but allows the choice to rest with the individual or organization. A growing number of countries have laws on the statute books that cover rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the organizations that involve them. They also provide tax incentives and subsidies for those organizations. By the same token, Governments can review legal and fiscal measures which impinge negatively on the status of volunteer-involving organizations, including issues related to juridical status, rights to associational activities and resource mobilization. One form of enforcing legislation are social audits that require corporations to conform to certain standards or values, which include support to employee volunteering.

40. **Volunteer checks**. An innovative and important provision in resolution 39/2 of the Commission for Social Development, adopted at its thirty-ninth session, is encouragement to Governments to take into account the possible impact of general social and economic policy measures upon citizens' opportunities to volunteer. This idea builds on the notion that peoples' volunteering is often affected unintentionally by legislation in areas not normally perceived as falling within the ambit of volunteering. Measures related to labour, for example, such as the length of the workweek and the age of retirement have an impact on the profile of volunteering. Some countries have proposed a "volunteer check" on relevant legislation, as has been applied to the fields of environment and gender.

41. **Decentralization**. Where Governments are successful in implementing decentralization policies which lead to the spread of responsibility and power-sharing at the local level, public services are brought closer to communities and peoples' control over their use increases. This opens space for greater citizen engagement expressed through channels such as parental involvement in schools and community involvement in natural resource management. Development initiatives downstream, which systematically involve users, are likely to result in the willingness of people at the local level to invest their own time.

42. **Infrastructure**. Limited transport and communication infrastructure restricts the capacity of people to organize for voluntary activities, as does the lack of meeting places, such as public parks, places of worship and community halls. This is especially true of geographically dispersed populations and of people living in poverty. While the rationale for infrastructure improvements is unlikely to be based on the desire to facilitate volunteerism, it is desirable to factor into the planning process the impact of such improvements on levels of volunteering.

43. **Promotion of volunteerism**. Governments can play a valuable role in highlighting the contribution of volunteering. Concerned departments can organize briefings and seminars for policy makers and the media. Official papers on the status of volunteering and the issues that need to be addressed can be published and widely disseminated. High-profile events and campaigns can be organized on national days and on International Volunteer Day. Relations between Government and the broadcast, print and electronic media vary greatly from country to country, but in most instances Governments can help to challenge volunteer stereotypes and shape the messages on volunteering it wishes to pass on to the general public. This can be achieved through special programmes and public service announcements or by joint initiatives such as award schemes. Establishing national databases on volunteer opportunities in collaboration with the voluntary sector is another valuable measure Governments can take.

44. **Volunteer centres**. Increasingly, countries are appreciating the valuable stimulus to formal service volunteering which volunteer centres provide through their work in advocating for voluntary action, monitoring developments and encouraging new initiatives. Governments have often taken a leading or supportive role. National volunteer centres can provide effective leadership in the formal volunteer movement, but regional and local centres are needed to ensure linkages to the grass-roots communities from which a large proportion of volunteers are likely to be drawn. Government support in terms of legal and fiscal frameworks and financial support may be a critical factor in the sustainability of such centres.

45. **Financial support for volunteering**. It is important that maintaining a non-partisan approach in working with the volunteer movement be a primary consideration in Government interventions. As has been mentioned already, however, there are costs associated with providing an adequate legal, human and physical infrastructure for volunteering. Ideally, public sector initiatives undertaken by line ministries would include in their budgets such costs so that they become mainstream items and not "add-ons". In other words, a mass immunization, literacy or low-cost housing campaign would include budgetary provision for the mobilization, orientation and training, monitoring and recognition of volunteers. However, certain areas of Government support such as awareness-raising campaigns or development of volunteer centre infrastructure require that Governments make specific financial commitments in their national budgets.

46. **Public sector volunteering**. In many countries, Governments are large employers and are therefore in a position to generate and support voluntary action from a sizeable portion of the labour force. Apart from adding to the volunteer pool, mobilizing public sector workers sets a positive example for society and helps instil a sense of collective responsibility and opportunity. There is a range of possibilities, for example, giving officials time off to undertake volunteer work, providing material and other support to causes that staff choose to support, designating a day or a week for volunteer initiatives, granting employees special leave of absence to undertake voluntary service at home or overseas and providing recognition, including career enhancement incentives to staff who volunteer. Professional support for incorporating or strengthening volunteerism in the public sector is highly desirable and establishing a dedicated special unit may help facilitate this action.

47. **Training of volunteer managers**. Developing formal service volunteering calls for a set of skills which merits recognition as in the case of any other area of specialization. In a few countries, where volunteering already has a high profile, the issue of specialized training and the formation of a professional cadre of volunteer managers and trainers has already been addressed. Governments can introduce formally recognized credentials for people working in the area of the promotion of volunteerism and can also put State training facilities at the disposal of volunteer-involving organizations. Within the public sector itself, Governments can also ensure that volunteering is included in the training programme curricula of managers in line ministries.

48. **Special groups**. Various sectors of society have differing propensities to volunteer time. It is known that certain population groups such as youth, older people and people with disabilities may be less engaged in voluntary action but still have considerable skills and knowledge to contribute. Among the principal reasons these special groups may not volunteer are the lack of access to information on volunteer opportunities and the fact of not being asked to participate. Governments can devise strategies to maximize the involvement of these groups in the volunteer movement. Some countries are starting to draw extensively on the power of information technology to address the issue of access to volunteering opportunities, which is likely to be a growing trend in the coming years.

49. **Youth volunteering**. Experience shows that when youth are offered meaningful opportunities to contribute they react very positively. Promoting volunteering within educational establishments and youth services, developing specific programmes to encourage youth volunteering, putting in place systems to recognize and accredit volunteering by youth and working with the media to present an attractive image of volunteering can have a significant impact on the level of youth participation and constitute a sound investment in a country's human resources. The impact, moreover, is likely to have lasting results, given that volunteering in one's youth is a strong predictor of volunteering later in life.

50. **Partnership-building**. One observable trend in some countries which could be encouraged in many others is the establishment of "compacts" between Government and the voluntary sector. These compacts set out steps Governments can take to support the development of a healthy and independent voluntary sector and volunteer movement. This may include arrangements for the joint planning, implementation and monitoring of volunteer-based activities and could incorporate the employee volunteer activities of the private sector. They are deliberately not exhaustive, but constitute a general framework, which recognizes the diversity of volunteerism at the level of a specific country. Moreover, they are not legally binding documents but derive authority from their endorsement by participating sectors through the extensive consultation process that generally accompanies their formulation.

51. **Development cooperation**. While all the above measures apply to developed and developing countries alike, there is a particular set of measures that donors can apply in their development cooperation programmes. Increasingly in developed countries, the spirit of volunteerism is being recognized and extolled as a valuable component of good governance with citizens taking responsibility not only for themselves but also for one another. This good news on the domestic front, however, does not permeate development cooperation policy and practice. Some of the most valuable contributions in kind that developing countries can offer are the rich, local traditions of voluntary self-help and mutual aid, which are often ignored. Recognizing and building strategically on these traditions can open the way to mobilize a vast constituency in support of efforts of developing country Governments. For donor countries, forging a link in the public's mind between domestic volunteering and voluntary action in developing countries can also help enlist public support for overseas development assistance.

B. Support by the United Nations system

52. The basic principles underlying volunteerism are at the very core of the United Nations concern to meet peoples' needs, protect their rights and help give them a voice. Action by citizens to support one another and to participate fully in society is enshrined in the founding charters of many constituent parts of the United Nations. Most United Nations specialized agencies and programmes draw on voluntary action in the national context to achieve their goals, as illustrated earlier in this report, and many draw on the United Nations Volunteers, created by the General Assembly, for international volunteers. Volunteerism is the backbone of many projects and programmes on the ground and underpins much of the campaigning for causes supported by the United Nations and resource mobilization. This section highlights some specific measures the United Nations can take to promote volunteerism.

53. **Awareness-raising**. There is ample scope for the United Nations system as a whole to build awareness internally and with its partners as regards the role of volunteerism in the various areas in which it is active and to sensitize its constituencies as to the implications in terms of activities undertaken. At the political level, volunteering as a phenomenon needs to be strategically managed and supported and can be incorporated into the agenda of meetings of the various governing bodies of the United Nations system. The system can also work downstream in countries where it is actively engaged to help ensure synergies between the headquarters of United Nations system bodies and the field so that policy on volunteerism informs downstream practice and downstream learning feeds back into policy.

54. **Dissemination of information**. The United Nations system can use its networks to disseminate information about the link between volunteerism and major global concerns through technical and flagship publications, workshops and Internet sites. This would also serve to extend recognition to volunteers and their organizations, which could be complemented by awards and other measures, including raising the profile of International Volunteer Day on 5 December.

55. **Recognition**. Volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations have received special recognition from some United Nations system bodies during the International Year of Volunteers. This practice could be extended and expanded so that it becomes a regular feature across the system.

56. **Volunteer schemes**. The United Nations system is well placed to include volunteers in its activities and to support the establishment of volunteer schemes to address a range of global concerns. In fields such as environment, health, housing and literacy, the strategic

involvement of volunteers in close partnership with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other actors can bring considerable added value. Where they exist, national and local volunteer centres could benefit enormously from the specialized expertise and networks of the United Nations system.

57. **Mobilizing the staff of the United Nations**. The staff of the United Nations system represents a significant resource for the volunteer movement. As with government employees, many thousands of internationally and nationally recruited United Nations employees, including several heads of United Nations agencies, undertake voluntary activities on an individual level or through organizations of their choice. It would appear that, as in the case of the government and the private sector, volunteerism would benefit from developing means of actively encouraging and utilizing the special skills and experiences of the United Nations staff.

58. **United Nations Volunteers**. The United Nations Volunteers, as the volunteer arm of the United Nations, already promote volunteering, including through the placement of volunteers. In carrying out their functions as focal point for the International Year of Volunteers, the United Nations Volunteers have undertaken a range of activities concerned with enhancing the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteering, which will be reported on at the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly. The strengthening of the ongoing role of the United Nations Volunteers in the promotion of volunteering will also be reported on at that time.

59. Volunteering is not a new phenomenon. It has always been a part of civilized behaviour. What is new is approaching voluntary action strategically as a means of expanding resources, addressing global issues and improving the quality of life for everyone. Governments and the United Nations system can positively affect the level and impact of volunteering. However, the converse is also true. By neglecting to factor volunteering into the design and implementation of policies, there is a risk of overlooking a valuable asset and undermining traditions of cooperation that bind communities together.

Annex

United Nations resolutions and documents on volunteering

1. Resolution 52/17 of 20 November 1997, by which the General Assembly proclaimed 2001 the International Year of Volunteers.

2. Contribution from the United Nations Volunteers Programme, entitled "Volunteering and social development" (A/AC.253/16/Add.7), for the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and Further Initiatives.

3. Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (see A/S-24/8/Rev.1, annex, sect. III, commitment 4, paras. 54 and 55).

4. Resolution 55/57 of 4 December 2000 on the International Year of Volunteers.

5. Note by the Secretary-General, entitled "The role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development", E/CN.5/2001/6.

6. Commission for Social Development resolution 39/2, entitled "Volunteering and social development" (see E/2001/26, para. 5).

7. Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries in May 2001 (see A/CONF.191/11, para 32 (*i*) (b) and para. 41 (*ii*) (a)).

8. Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the twenty-fifth special session of the General Assembly (see the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium, annex, para. 42, contained in document A/S-25/7/Rev.1, para. 15).

9. Summary by the Chairman of the Commission for Social Development of the discussion of the expert panel on the role of volunteerism in the promotion of social development (see E/2001/26, paras. 35 and 36).

Other resolutions and documents

1. Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee (Council of Europe) report, entitled "Improving the status and role of volunteers as a contribution by the Parliamentary Assembly to the International Year of Volunteers".

2. Inter-Parliamentary Union Council resolution entitled "Support to the United Nations International Year for Volunteers: 2001", adopted at the 168th session on 7 April 2001.